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AUTHOR Toombs, William
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ABSTRACT

This document investigates doctoral study as an educational experience. Emphasis is placed on the instrument of instruction, designs for scholarly socialization, patterns of learning, and the educational implications of graduate study. (MJM)

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The Center for the Study of Higher Education
The Pennsylvania State University
William Toombs
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GRADUATE STUDY AS EDUCATION

Graduate study at the doctoral level in every discipline is generally regarded as professional training. Not much attention is paid to doctoral study as an educational experience. In some respects it is the point at which all the idealized notions of previous schooling come together in practical application. Very low student faculty ratios, interpersonal association with experienced scholars, autonomy for self-learning, access to an enriched educational environment of laboratory and library, and freedom from constraints of class bells and term breaks, make this the most liberated of learning situations. In other respects, it would appear that all the devices seen as aids to learning are cast aside. There is no curriculum as such. The efficiency of didactic instruction is put aside. The guidance of numerous specialized teachers no longer offers structure in the form of courses, textbooks, or outlines. Guides to pacing or timing are foresworn and counseling along with similar activities is regarded as unnecessary. These two sets of conditions make study at the doctoral level very different from anything that has preceded it in the school setting. The rapid shift from one setting to another has confounded many good students, as the large population of ABD's attests.

What is the paradigm of instruction at the doctoral level and how does it read? In one sense the focus is sharp and the emphasis quite singular. It is the development of intellect and the cultivation of that rational ability as an instrument for inquiry or practice that is the single aim. All else is extraneous. The task is delicate for each candidate must be introduced to the discipline of his field in ways that will not impair the natural sense of curiosity and imagination that marks the difference between pedantry and scholarship. The public understands this very imperfectly, and

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the rapid expansions of graduate education have done little to make it clearer. Any expectation that graduate study will provide charisma, leadership qualities, probity, or a broad capacity for judgment is misplaced. At its very best it provides a high degree of intellectual force set against a disciplinary or professional background that allows the individual to address in depth the problems of inquiry or practice. This is a formidable and tested tool for a society which is rooted in knowledge and driven by the forces of technology and science.

The instrument of instruction at work in graduate programs at the doctoral level is nothing less than the total learning situation. The individual voluntarily immerses himself in a setting not unlike the "total environment" developed so skillfully by Erving Goffman in his conceptualization of the resocialization process in closed institutions like hospitals, military camps, and prisons. In such a controlled environment, the student meets a succession of bounded situations each filled with critical incidents which in the end shape his outlook and refine his skills. The objective of the process in all its intricacies is the socialization of the individual to a well-defined role. This orientation of personal values, attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors, along with the careful development of elaborate cognitive, linguistic and where necessary manipulative skills, probably makes doctoral study one of the most powerful examples of adult socialization, all the more striking because both entry and continuance are essentially voluntary.

Designs for scholarly socialization appear to take two forms: One is the familiar master-apprenticeship relationship. The other is more subtle, still unlabeled, and sometimes difficult to accept. In the first instance the academic guild feels comfortable with the association of "magister et discipulus" partly because of long tradition but also because of the strong

reinforcement given it by the sciences in the modern world. The design is most compatible with fields where the corpus of knowledge has a sound structural framework and the student's apprehension of it is linear in form. The master "introduces" the apprentice to selected aspects of experience by example as well as by directive. Elaboration of knowledge in these disciplines is largely by accumulation so each scholar must keep some touch with the past as he moves to new inquiry. Notions of a close role model are equally useful in preparation for professions where common canons and conventions of practice hold the culture of the field together. Here the student learns how and what he will do; he also learns why.

The second design is more difficult to discern clearly, not because it is less real but because it is much less studied. It is harder for an institution, a college, department, or university, to establish and maintain. In this case individuals are introduced to an enriched but boundaried environment in which they are exposed, often repeatedly, to congeries of critical events. Like McLuhan's "electric" environment these events gain meaning from the students' organization of them, from what the individual brings to them. In the first engagements he or she perceives only the gross features and, excited by the points that coincide with his ideas, takes them in uncritically. Repeated participation brings skepticism, critical review, experimentation, strategies for exploring the tentative outcomes. The guiding force here is the immediate state of each individual's development. This internal force rather than external guidance gives selective perception.

Such a pattern of learning is suggested by Talcott Parsons' description of the way a child analyzes and incorporates experience within the setting of the family; a fundamental socialization process. The participant has not one mentor but many and their influence is orchestrated by the learner.

Options are not endless because the environment has boundaries and individual interests are finite. This is the "life space" concept of Kurt Lewin at work. It is those fields where knowledge is not so much cumulative as patterned that this mode of doctoral study is most applicable. The humanities are representative. Another case is found where there is a state of rapid change. The social sciences in the fifties and sixties were characterized by exponential growth of methodology that jarred and disrupted the classical structures of theory. Advanced students often end up on research problems that are not fully encompassed by any one professor's interests. For a university or even a department this kind of socialization is maintained with difficulty. There is a sense of lost control and a shifting base to student-faculty interaction. For students the loss of structure and timing may be acute and certainly some of the high rates of non-completion in fields like English or Education can be explained by this hazardous pattern of doctoral study.

Elements of both patterns exist in most fields but it is important to identify which mode is intended for each phase of study.

Thinking analytically about the educational implications of graduate study may not be required of everyone engaged with doctoral students but understanding the main themes of socialization is. The strength of a profession lies in the effectiveness and depth of each individual's understanding of the assumptions, values, and attitudes that lie behind the behaviors of active practice. It is this common base and background rather than any formal structure or allegiance that determines the coherence of a professional group and graduate education is responsible for producing it.